S. HRG. 98-864

NOMINATION OF JOHN W. VESSEY, JR.

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE

NINETY-EIGHTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

NOMINATION OF

GEN. JOHN W. VESSEY, JR., U.S. ARMY, TO BE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, FOR AN ADDITIONAL TWO-YEAR TERM, PURSUANT TO TITLE 10, UNITED STATES CODE, SECTION 142

MAY 3, 1984

Printed for the use of the Committee on Armed Services

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
36-696 O WASHINGTON: 1984

5201-38

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NOMINATION OF GEN. JOHN W. VESSEY, JR., U.S. ARMY, TO BE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

THURSDAY, MAY 3, 1984

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to other business, at 12:25 p.m., in room SD–106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator John Tower (chairman) presiding.

Present: Senators Tower, Nunn, and Levin.

Staff present: James F. McGovern, staff director and chief counsel; Arnold L. Punaro, staff director for the minority, Alan R. Yuspeh, general counsel; Jeffrey H. Smith, minority counsel; Christine C. Dauth, chief clerk; L. Wayne Arny III, Robert F. Bott, Michael B. Donley, Richard D. Finn, Jr., William E. Hoehn, Jr., George K. Johnson, Jr., David S. Lyles, and John G. Campbell, professional staff members; Gerald D. Strickler, printing and documents clerk; Douglas R. Graham and Patricia L. Watson, research assistants; and Marie Chaillet and Lisa M. Tietge, staff assistants.

Also present: Les Brownlee, assistant to Senator Warner; Ronald P. Kelly, assistant to Senator Humphrey; Bernard R. Toon, assistant to Senator Quayle; Mark J. Albrecht, assistant to Senator Wilson; Mary A. Shields, assistant to Senator Stennis; Jeffrey B. Subko, assistant to Senator Exon; Peter D. Lennon, assistant to Senator Levin; and Edward McGaffigan, Jr., assistant to Senator Bingaman.

[The nomination reference and biographical sketch of General Vessey follow:]

NOMINATION REFERENCE

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,
April 6, 1984.
(Under authority of the order of the Senate of April 5, 1984.)

Ordered, that the following nomination be referred to the Committee on Armed Services:

The following-named officer under the provisions of Title 10, United States Code, Section 142, to be Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, a position of importance and responsibility designated by the President under Title 10, United States Code, Section 601:

To be general

John W. Vessey, Jr., 703–07–1974, United States Army.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF GEN. JOHN W. VESSEY, JR.

General John W. Vessey, Jr., was appointed the tenth Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense, by President Ronald Reagan June 18, 1982. In this capacity, he serves as the senior military advisor to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense. General Vessey served as Vice Chief of Staff, United States Army, prior to his current appointment.

General Vessey was born and reared in Minnesota. He enlisted in the Minnesota National Guard in May 1939, and was called to active duty in February 1941. He rose to the rank of first sergeant before receiving a battlefield commission as a second lieutenant of Field Artillery at the Anzio Beachhead May 6, 1944.

Much of General Vessey's military service has been with combat divisions. His past assignments include the 34th Infantry Division in North Africa and Italy during World War II, the 4th Infantry Division in Germany, two tours with the 3rd Armored Division in Germany, the 25th Infantry Division in Vietnam, and command of the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Carson, Colorado.

In 1975, General Vessey was promoted to Lieutenant General and became the U.S. Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans. He was promoted to his present grade in 1976 and assigned to Korea as Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command; Commander, U.S. Forces, Korea; and Commanding General, Eighth U.S. Army. In 1978, he also became the first Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Korea-United States Combined Forces Command. General Vessey returned to Washington in July 1979 to become the Vice Chief of Staff, United States Army.

General Vessey's military schooling includes the Special Basic, Associate Advanced, and Advanced courses of the Field Artillery School; the Command and General Staff College; the Armed Forces Staff College; the Industrial College of the Armed Forces; and the Army Aviation School.

He is the recipient of numerous military decorations and awards including the Distinguished Service Cross, the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, the Army Distinguished Service Medal, and the Purple Heart.

General Vessey's civilian education includes a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, and a Master of Science degree from the George Washington University, Washington, D.C., he also attended the University of Pittsburgh's Management Program for Executives. He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. General Vessey was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Letters degree from Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota; an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland; and an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

In addition to his military duties, General Vessey serves on the Board of Governors of the American Red Cross; Youth Service, U.S.A., Inc.; and National Flag Day Committee; and is Co-Chairman, Awards Committee, American Academy of Achievement. He is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Washington Policy Council of the International Management and Development Institute (IMDI). Among his civilian awards honoring his public service are the State of Minnesota Distinguished Service Medal; the Alumni Achievement Award, George Washington University; the Distinguished Alumnus Award, University of Maryland; and the Golden Plate Award, American Academy of Achievement.

General Vessey is married to the former Avis Funk of Minneapolis, Minnesota. They have two sons, John III, a Foreign Service Officer, and David, a Warrant Officer pilot with the U.S. Army; and a daughter, Sarah.

OPENING STATEMENT BY SENATOR JOHN TOWER, CHAIRMAN

Chairman TOWER. The committee will come to order. We have convened to consider the nomination of Gen. John W. Vessey, Jr., U.S. Army, to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

I would like to go directly to questions to General Vessey.

I might first note that May is a significant month for General Vessey. It was in May 1939 he enlisted in the Minnesota National Guard and rose to the rank of first sergeant in World War II.

He has had 45 years of continuous service to his country. In May 40 years ago General Vessey was commissioned as a second lieutenant by a radiogram from Gen. Mark Clark on the Anzio beachhead.

On March 19, 1983, General Clark said of General Vessey:

> The 34th Division had a longer combat service than any other division in the 5th Army. As I contemplate my old days and why I was able to go where I went, it is because I had men like General Vessey. He has been a combat soldier all his life.
>
> I know firsthand of his service and I am proud to have been associated with him.

I might note that General Vessey is the only Chairman to have held every rank from private to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I think that is commendable.

I only got as far as master chief petty officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve. So, if I have any aspirations, I think I will forget about them because I don't have much time left.

Senator NUNN. You have lots of years left, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman TOWER. General Vessey is a very highly decorated officer. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, which is the Nation's second highest award for courage on the battlefield.

General, I think that this committee intends to be very favorably disposed toward you and your performance.

I have no questions to ask you. I will yield to my distinguished colleague, Senator Nunn.

Senator NUNN. Mr. Chairman, I don't have questions relating to whether or not General Vessey should be confirmed for his second term as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I want to make that clear in the beginning.

I join you in congratulating General Vessey for his distinguished career from the rank of private right through to his present service.

I certainly will support his renomination with enthusiasm.

I do have a few questions I wanted to reserve until now rather than take the time of Secretary Weinberger.

General Vessey, a year ago or longer I asked all the members of the Joint Chiefs about whether they had projected basically a fencing off of the strategic programs at a lower rate of defense growth, strategic programs being given top priority, not being cut any if you projected a lower rate of defense budget.

I used a figure of 5 percent there. I asked all the members of the Joint Chiefs this. At that time, as I recall, General Meyer and General Gabriel expressed concerns about what would happen to conventional forces if that occurred.

We are now at the point where it has occurred. It occurred last year. It is going to occur again this year. We will have somewhere in the neighborhood of 5 percent growth.

I repeat the question: Have the Joint Chiefs taken a look at what happens in the conventional area if you fence the strategic nuclear budget, which is being done, if you fence the space budget, which is more robust now than it was at the time my question was posed, and then assume a 5-percent growth rate?

Have you done that yet?

STATEMENT OF GEN. JOHN W. VESSEY, JR., U.S. ARMY, CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

General VESSEY. We have looked at the fencing of the strategic nuclear programs under a variety of contexts. Particularly we have looked at it in light of this reduction that was submitted by the Secretary this morning.

It does not take any great mathematician to deduce that if you fence strategic nuclear programs and take defense cuts you will cut them out of conventional programs. That concerns the Joint Chiefs, particularly the deeper the cut is, the more conventional forces are cut.

At the same time it is fair to say that we have discussed this matter with every one of our CINC's. Each CINC has told us that the No. 1 priority is to go ahead with the strategic nuclear modernization, but there comes a point when you may have to slow all of it in order to keep a reasonably balanced program.

Senator NUNN. By that you mean slow the strategic nuclear also?

General VESSEY. Slow the strategic nuclear to continue with a balanced program. We are not at that point with this program.

Senator NUNN. If Congress cuts 5 percent, are we at the point we are to fence away from strategic nuclear programs and slow those, too, rather than take all the cuts out of the conventional?

General VESSEY. We are not taking all the cuts out of the conventional. Some $1.2 billion of this particular cut is coming out of strategic and they hurt.

The cut that the Joint Chiefs wrestled over, one that Senator Warner talked about, was the cut for the command and control of submarines.

So, there is a point and 5 percent is very close.

Senator NUNN. You think we are getting down to the point where somebody over there at the Joint Chiefs' level is getting ready to holler uncle in behalf of the conventional forces?

General VESSEY. It depends on what the cuts are. Certainly we will holler uncle.

Senator NUNN. Will you holler loud enough for us to take a look at the B–1 production rate?

General VESSEY. We will holler loud enough for you to hear the hollering, I am sure, Senator.

Senator NUNN. It seems to me you are getting right up to the edge. Am I reading you correctly?

You have not hollered yet, but you are drawing a deep breath and are ready to holler?

General VESSEY. You are at the point in strategic nuclear programs where we are marching along. Modernization is going ahead. The Joint Chiefs agree modernization needs to go ahead.

If we start to cut it again, we induce the same sort of inefficiencies in those programs that we induce in any other programs by cutting them.

We are at a very difficult point with the Soviets in negotiations now. The Soviets have walked out of the negotiations. I personally believe that the Soviets' attempt at negotiations in the last few years was a charade.

The charade was to try to separate the United States from its allies, particularly Western European allies, on the nuclear issue. They were trying to wait and see whether or not the American and Western political processes would control Western nuclear arms.

In the arms negotiations we want to control the Soviet arms; they want to control ours. When we control ourselves, then the Soviets really don't have any good reason to want to negotiate with us for arms control.

So, we are at a key point in this whole nuclear security issue. By advocating cuts in the strategic nuclear programs at the key time in the negotiations with the Soviets, in the whole relationship with the Soviets, it seems to me we are in danger of rewarding the Soviets for their obstinate behavior and I don't like to see us do that.

At the same time it is necessary to keep a balanced program.

Senator NUNN. Have you taken into account General Rogers' statement that he continues to make with increasing frequency, that within the first few days of any kind of conventional war, he would have to ask for nuclear weapons to be released and that we are very dependent on the early use of nuclear weapons in Europe?

Does that give you pause in trying to reach this balance?

General VESSEY. That gives me pause in trying to reach this balance.

Senator NUNN. One other question.

Secretary Weinberger said a few minutes ago, and you heard the dialog, that nothing was done to modernize our strategic triad until 1981.

Without asking you directly whether you agree or disagree with that statement, would you categorize for us the strategic triad that we now are developing and when each system started?

General VESSEY. I would have to get that for the record for you. It seems to me you pointed that out pretty well yourself.

Senator NUNN. Could I take it then you agree with the general thrust of my remarks in that vein that we have a continuous strategic program and that we have to have continuity from one administration to the other and indeed most of our strategic modernization programs now underway started either in the Nixon administration, the Ford administration, or the Carter administration, and added to that has been a C–3 modernization plus the B–1 in the Reagan administration?

General VESSEY. Yes, but certainly it is fair to say that the Reagan administration placed a great deal of emphasis on acceleration of the modernization program.

Senator NUNN. I think that is a mixed bag. Some of it has been, some has not.

The air-launched cruise missile has been cut back from the original plan.

My understanding is that the Trident submarine has been slowed down in terms of production.

The Secretary's statement was so amiss from historical fact, I won't go further into that.

Perhaps you can furnish for the record a statement on each one of our strategic initiatives now and give me the date of origin and whose administration.

General VESSEY. Yes, sir.

I think it is very important to understand that defense programs as a whole have to have continuity and bipartisan support through the years.

[The information follows:]

The Department of Defense has not established a specific point during the development of a weapon system to be that system's "date of origin." However, in response to your request for this type of information, we are providing the date of the decision to initiate full-scale engineering development which is called the Defense Systems Acquisition Review Council (DSARC) II.

Weapon	Date of DSARC II	Presidential administration
Trident submarine	December 1972	Nixon.
Ground-launched cruise missile [GLCM]	October 1977	Carter.
Sea-launched cruise missile [SLCM]	January 1977	Do.
Air-launched cruise missile [ALCM]	January 1977 (initiated as replacement for B–1 bomber).	Do.
MX/Peacekeeper	September 1979	Do.
B–1A bomber	June 1970 (B–1A subsequently cancelled by Carter in October 1977).	Nixon.
B–1B	Program initiated in October 1981.	Reagan.
Trident D–5 SLBM	September 1983	Do.

In addition, President Reagan is responsible for coordinating and packaging the new systems into a comprehensive modernization program addressing a wide range of strategic deficiencies. Until his administration, few steps had been taken to improve either strategic connectivity (C3) or our continental air defense capabilities as a complement for new weapon systems.

Senator NUNN. Thank you, General Vessey.

I congratulate you on your great service to the country and I look forward to supporting your confirmation and I will continue to work with you.

Chairman TOWER. General Vessey, I would like to follow up on one of your responses to Senator Nunn's questions.

You said, I believe, that all of the CINC's have identified strategic modernization as their No. 1 priority; is that correct?

General VESSEY. That is correct, sir.

It is the view of the Chiefs and the CINC's that without a strategic nuclear force that deters nuclear war effectively, which makes it very clear to the Soviets that they can't threaten nuclear war or try blackmail with strategic nuclear superiority, that the rest of our defense programs probably are not going to be nearly as effective as they ought to be.

Chairman TOWER. Let me make a statement and see if you agree with it.

If we spend what is necessary now, allocate what resources are necessary now, to modernize our strategic force that would give us somewhat more leverage in trying to negotiate strategic arms reduction with the Soviets and if that can be successfully negotiated, then we could increase the allocation of resources to conventional and reduce the allocation of resources to strategic systems.

General VESSEY. I think that is correct.

As you alluded to earlier during the questioning, the strategic nuclear modernization is more cyclical in our own country than has been the conventional force modernization.

Chairman TOWER. Thank you, General Vessey.

Senator Levin?

Senator LEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Vessey, first let me add my congratulations to your reappointment, your well deserved reappointment.

May I add, I also look forward to voting for your confirmation.

The $13.9 billion figure which was arrived at, I take it, was arrived at without your input or concurrence.

Is that a fair statement?

General VESSEY. As Senator Tower pointed out, the $13.9 was handed to us.

Senator LEVIN. When it was handed to you, was it divided by service?

General VESSEY. The breakout was made by services and then by functions as well.

The services are the ones who have the budget. So, eventually it has to go to the services and Defense agencies.

Senator LEVIN. When the $13.9 billion was handed to you, was it also divided by service and function?

General VESSEY. The Secretary and the Defense Resources Board (DRB) and the whole group of advisers worked on how to do that.

Senator LEVIN. When it was given to the uniformed services?

General VESSEY. When the services got it, they got a bogey to shoot for.

Senator LEVIN. Each service?

General VESSEY. Yes, each service and the defense agencies.

Senator LEVIN. So that you did not divide the $13.9 billion by service? It was given to you already divided?

General VESSEY. I wouldn't say that. There is a tremendous amount of interaction in the Defense Department in arriving at this final figure.

Sure, everybody was given targets to begin with. Then each and every line was argued in the DRB. The services and the agencies got targets, to begin with, generally based on their percentage of the defense budget as a whole, which is the usual starting place for reductions.

Then the issues were argued and the final layout of it is considerably different from what the target was.

Senator LEVIN. As I understand it, you were given targets when you got the total of $13.9 billion, but then as a result of give and take between the services and DOD, there were changes in those totals and within the totals?

General VESSEY. That is correct.

Senator LEVIN. Now, you at some point, I presume, made recommendations to the Department, "you" being the uniformed services made recommendations totaling $13.9 billion?

General VESSEY. I am a member of the Secretary's Defense Resources Board so I participated in the whole exercise.

Senator LEVIN. Were the recommendations of the services adopted in toto by the DOD?

General VESSEY. No. There were some changes. The services made changes of their own after the Defense Resources Board argued the issues.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and I made recommendations based on the warfighting capability as it appeared to us.

The services went back and made changes based on those recommendations. So, there were weeks and weeks of give and take.

Senator LEVIN. Is it fair to say that the final recommendation to the Congress of $13.9 billion is not a precise reflection of what each service recommended?

General VESSEY. Yes; that is an accurate statement.

Senator LEVIN. We read in the paper a few weeks ago, on a totally different subject, that White House spokesman Larry Speakes said that the money which was needed for emergency assistance being sent to El Salvador, since it had not been approved yet by the Congress, would have to be absorbed in the Defense Department budget.

Can you tell us what he was referring to?

General VESSEY. I have forgotten the exact legislative authority for that, but it is the President's authority to declare an emergency and say, "All right, that is an emergency, reprogramming has to take place."

And he has to come back to the Congress.

I am sure the committee staff and members are more familiar with that than I.

Senator LEVIN. As far as you know, it does not come out of what we appropriate to the DOD?

General VESSEY. I will have to answer that for the record.

[The information follows:]

General VESSEY. Section 506A of the Foreign Assistance Act authorizes the President to draw down defense articles/services/training from DOD, not to exceed $75M in any fiscal year. Under the provisions of this Section the President has this authority once he makes a determination that there is an emergency which affects the national security. With this assessment he submits a notification to the Congress and states it cannot be met under any other provisions of law. It also authorizes the President to seek appropriation to reimburse DOD funds.

Senator LEVIN. My last question: Senator Bingaman indicated he calculated that about $2 billion plus in these cuts results from repricing, from currency exchange rates, refiguring, from reestimate of fuel prices, from reestimate of inflation rates, and those kinds of budget changes which have no direct effect on programs.

Are you generally familiar with that total of $2 billion plus?

General VESSEY. I have not added up the total, but I know there are a number of nonprogrammatic cuts, Pentagon lingo for that type of cuts.

For example, about half the O&M cut—and it was one that was of great concern to the Chiefs—the O&M account has been cut about 3 percent, but actually only about half of that is program cuts.

So, the Chiefs feel fairly comfortable with that.

Senator LEVIN. Do you know whether the nonprogrammatic cuts total about $2 billion?

General VESSEY. I can't tell you that. I have a calculating machine here and I can probably calculate it.

Senator LEVIN. Mr. Chairman, I do have additional questions for the Secretary.

Will the record be kept open?

Chairman TOWER. As I announced, the record will be kept open until noon tomorrow.

Is there anything further, Senator Nunn?

Senator NUNN. No, Mr. Chairman.

If you would like to have a vote on General Vessey, I would be agreeable.

Chairman TOWER. I will entertain a motion that his nomination be approved.

Senator NUNN. I so move.

Chairman TOWER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Senator NUNN. Maybe if the record can be left open, we can poll the others.

I have specific proxies to vote aye from Senator Exon and Senator Stennis.

Chairman TOWER. I have proxies on my side as well.

General Vessey, I don't think you will have trouble on the Senate floor.

General VESSEY. Thank you, Senator.

[Whereupon, at 12:43 p.m., the committee proceeded to other business.]

[The nomination of Gen. John W. Vessey, Jr., was reported to the Senate by Senator Tower on May 3, 1984, with the recommendation that the nomination be confirmed. The nomination was confirmed by the Senate on May 10, 1984.]

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